

THE
YOUNG MAN'S
MONITOR;

SHEWING

The GREAT HAPPINESS of
EARLY PIETY;

AND THE

DREADFUL CONSEQUENCES

OF INDULGING

YOUTHFUL LUSTS.

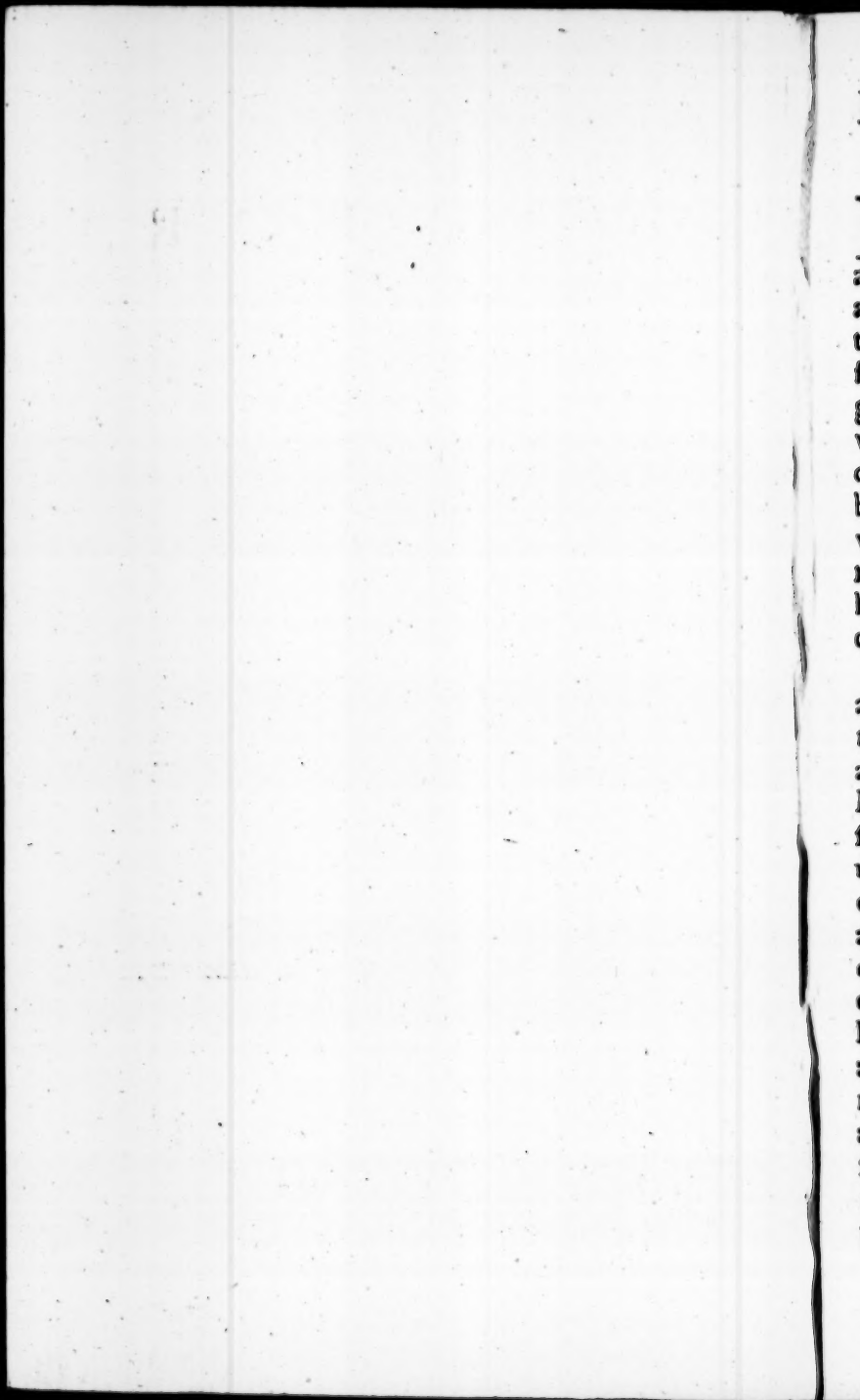
The ELEVENTH EDITION, Corrected.

By JOSIAH WOODWARD, D. D.
Late Minister of Poplar.

L O N D O N:

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T O T H E RELIGIOUS SOCIETIES

In and about L O N D O N, &c.

IT is in hope, my dear Brother, of advancing in the tender breasts of many Young People such a just concern for Religion and eternal Happiness, as I verily think I have observed in many of you, that I now publish this compassionate call to sinful Prodigals; who, by leaving the house and government of their heavenly Father, have parted with all true honour, peace and happiness; and can never retrieve those blessed enjoyments, but by an effectual return to GOD and their duty; which gives us such an undeniable reason for the necessity of the Conversion of a sinner in order to his happiness, that no person who will seriously consider it, can withstand its convincing power.

For who can once think, that men may fight against GOD, and come off with victory and triumph? or, that such as love nothing so much as sin and pollution, can inherit the undefiled kingdom of our Lord JESUS CHRIST? or, that such as serve the Devil, and bear his likeness upon earth, will be as happy as the regenerate children of GOD in the other world? The least application of mind will shew us the impossibility of these things; and consequently, that all wicked people must speedily repent and amend their lives, or perish for ever. But yet indeed it is a very sad truth, of which we have too many mournful Instances, that habituated sinners may at last arrive at such a desperate pitch of Insensibleness, as to be blind to all the convictive methods of the gospel, and dead to the mighty persuasives thereof.

I have therefore chiefly directed this evangelical

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call to Young Persons, who are not yet so fatally inured to sin; hoping that their ears are not thus judiciously closed against the proclaimed Grace of our Lord JESUS CHRIST.

And truly as to this, it is matter of abundant praise to GOD, that he hath opened the ears and hearts of many of You to receive divine instruction in your younger Years; and this to such effectual purpose, that it is enough to affect the dullest beholder to see the vigour and steadfastness of your zeal for GOD, and your humble and holy deportment in his sight.

What suitable praise can we offer to GOD, the giver of all good, when we behold Youth giving examples of piety to Age; delighting in the praises of GOD as their chief joy; and celebrating the exercises of our holy Religion with such relish and delight, as gives a seasonable demonstration to this abandoned age, that there are vaster pleasures to be reaped from the blessed entertainments of Religion, than from the utmost indulgence of sensual vanities?

I would therefore intreat all Young Persons, who are naturally *lovers of pleasure*, to make this experiment; namely, to frequent the holy ordinances of GOD, and join their hearts with a suitable warmth to yours, in the worship, love and praises of GOD, for a competent time, and then let them tell us, whether “one day in the
“house (and with the household) of GOD, be not
“better than a thousand in the tents of wicked-
“ness?” And whether any company be really so desirable as that which tends to advance our spiritual and everlasting happiness.

In this, they will have an inconceivable advantage over such as engage themselves in wicked

company ; for these meet to their mutual condemnation, and to the confusion of each others faces ; to enflame each others lusts here, and to be firebrands to each others consciences for ever. And therefore except they are perfectly hardened, they who meet together for sinful ends must needs leave each others company with sorrowful hearts, wishing they had never seen or met each other ; regretting the guilt with which they have loaded each others consciences ; foreseeing with horror the light of that day which will discover all the works of darkness ; in which the partners in sin must appear together to “ give an account for “ what they have jointly done in the flesh.”

But pious Society begins and ends otherways. Such meet to advance the glory of God, and the grace and peace of each others Souls. And therefore they part, as I have observed, with joyful reflections on what they have been transacting together ; and with a blessed hope of meeting each other with joy before God, and of being ever with him.

Enlivened by this hope, your zeal may well take wing, and soar to a lofty eminency. But then, lest it should evaporate, or become unsteady, you happily take care, by your excellent Rules, to poise your zeal by a ponderous Humility, and the steady love of Unity and Order. For you make a truly Christian Reformation without a Sect ; and whilst you hate and separate from sin, you love and pity the sinner ; and whilst your affections are in the greatest warmth, you keep to that sound Form of Doctrine and Devotion in which you have been educated ; and do your utmost to revive the primitive purity and power of the Christian Religion in the most antient methods.

In these and other particulars you shew a zeal

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steered by knowledge and balanced by humility ; which is a good argument that it is a fruit of the Spirit of God ; and is the best ground I any where find to hope that God will not leave us utterly. Only be exceeding careful to walk worthy of this your special profession of Religion ; always remembering of what concernment all religious actions are, wherein God is the object, conscience the register, and eternity the consequence.

It may be expected from you, that ye should *do more than others*. And O ! may it ever be seen that you are to others exemplary in all humility, purity and integrity of heart and life.

Then will you lay a good foundation, and increase in your holy purposes ; you will then engage the prayers of all the lovers of God and Religion on your behalf : and may it please the God of all grace to enliven and advance your zeal for his glory to such a conspicuous brightness, as may greatly glorify his name on earth, retrieve the honour of our holy Religion, and increase the number of the true worshippers of God ; till at last, all these lesser luminaries of the Church below shall be united in that grand constellation of the Church above, where holiness will never be envied, reproached or molested ; and will never need to be excited, cherished or advanced ; for there it will be the very nature, bliss and glory of perfected souls, to love, serve, and praise God.

Into this *blessed Society of the First born* may it please God in his time, to introduce every one of you, and every one that bears the Name of CHRIST ; in particular,

Your affectionate Servant in the Gospel,

JOS. WOODWARD.

THE
Y O U N G M A N ' s
M O N I T O R.

I N T R O D U C T I O N.

SINCE Young People are very often assaulted by powerful temptations to Sin and Vanity; both from the Violence of their own carnal inclinations, and the many ill examples of this present world; nothing can be a more seasonable kindness to them, than to shew them the pernicious folly of walking after their own hearts lust, and after the examples of ungodly men.

And on the contrary it is likewise very necessary that they should be convinced, how truly sweet and blessed it will be to them, to live according to their Christian Vows; and to preserve that religious integrity which will insure God's favour to them in all conditions, whilst they live on earth; and will render them truly happy when they come to die.

It is therefore the sole design of this little treatise, to demonstrate to all Young Persons, what solid comfort and true honour they will attain by *beginning* their life well, in dedicating the first-fruits of their reason and strength to God, and by refraining from those indulgencies of Youthful Lusts, whereby many ruin themselves in the morning of their age, and make their life like a cloudy winter's day, very *short*, and very *uncomfortable*.

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But if Young People, through the grace and blessing of GOD, preserve their youthful tenderness and modesty, and fortify their dispositions by the true love and fear of GOD, they will become as a wall of brass about them in their advanced years, to preserve their Piety and Virtue: and they will find it to be a sort of violence to their temper, to open any passage to inordinate lust. And hereby they will prevent the dismal effects of those follies which some lament bitterly in their declining years, and others regret with horror to all eternity.

It is one great unhappiness of Youth, that it has but little Experience of things. They have not seen such ruinous instances of Sin and Lust, as more aged persons have; and therefore they have not such horrible ideas of sin as are very useful to confirm them in the ways of Religion. But here their prudence must induce them to learn at the cost of others, whose follies have betrayed them to the lashes of their fatal Wickedness, rather than to try the dangerous experiment upon themselves.

And as to this, alas! the blotted names, the ruined estates, and the rotting carcases of many vicious young Men, will give them an irrefragable demonstration, that "the fear of GOD is the beginning of wisdom," the paths of Religion the only paths of rational pleasure and peace, and that nothing but well-doing can come off with honour and advantage at the last.

Such as set out well in the ways of Godliness and Honesty, and persist therein with a comely steadiness and integrity, shall shine as beautiful lights on earth, and hereafter as glorious stars in the firmament of God for ever and ever. Every step they take, will advance their comfortable prospect into the other world. It tends to make

their minds easy, their consciences serene, their hearts at rest, their affections lighter, their conversation useful, their self-inquiry comfortable, their prospect delightful, their days happy, their death rapturous, and their eternity blessed.

But if any unhappy Youth, forgetting or slighting the covenant of his Baptism, and the law of his God, will put himself among the children of Folly, and run with others to the same excess of Riot; what a torrent of Misery will from henceforth flow it upon him? He is taken captive by the Devil, and is bound in the chains of his own wickedness. He has not one reasonable comfort left, except it be what relates to his Repentance; and the comforts of this are only to be attained by very bitter Sorrow: And without this his life is a state of darkness, and his death will be a scene of endless anguish.

Now forasmuch as the most serious thoughts of these things are of the greatest use to all people, but more especially to those that are young; and as an example of this is more moving than the bare representation of it in an admonition, it has pleased our blessed Saviour, that infinite lover of souls, to draw up the whole landskip of youthful extravagance, from its beginning in Pride and Folly, to its end in Shame and Misery, in his parable of a *Prodigal Youth*, (Luke xv.) and withal we have there an account of his Repentance and Conversion, the only expedients that remained to redress the miseries he had brought upon himself.

And because this is what I would earnestly recommend to all such as have taken any wrong steps in the course of their life, I shall take the Rise and Scheme of my following Discourse from

that serious expression of the Prodigal, which we find *Luke xv. 18*. "I will arise and go to my FATHER, and will say unto him, FATHER, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee : and am no more worthy to be called thy Son."

These were the Prodigal's serious thoughts and purposes, *when he came to himself*. And that we may consider them the better, let us look back a little on the Follies and Extravagancies of his past life, in which the following circumstances tend to our edification.

S E C T. I.

THIS Prodigal was in the prime of his Youth, that blooming season of human life, from which the after-fruits may very much be guessed at. We read in the 12th verse, that the younger son said to his Father, "Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." He would fain be his *own man* now ; free from the restraints and counsels of his Father's government. And thus the wild and wilful Youth, led by his youthful lusts and vanity, ran on to the very brink of ruin.

Observe, 1. "That the time of Youth is a very dangerous and critical season, and needs the most of any to be kept strictly under good tutorage, and to have the benefit of good examples." In youth many Lusts and Passions are strong, and the Judgment and Understanding is weak. And therefore it greatly needs to be guided by wise and experienced Governors. It is a great error in education, and I fear it has proved fatal to many, to think, that when young People arrive to the age of fifteen or sixteen years, they are then fit to be left to their own conduct, and need little over-

sight. Quite otherwise, now is the most dangerous season of all their life. One opportunity of committing such gross sin as they are now capable of, may undo them for ever.

This is a time in which good principles, dispositions and manners, are to be formed in them; and they are now the most easy to take those impressions, which are the most difficult to be altered in their riper years. They are now setting out for Heaven or Hell; and which way soever they take, their youthful warmth and spirit is like to carry them on fiercely in it. And therefore happy are they who fall into good hands, and so enjoy a sober and pious education, if they have grace and wisdom to make a good use of it; the want of which had like to have ruined the vain Youth in the text. He had a very good Father, and was under a very pious government; but he grew weary of it, and would have his own will: And therefore he resolves to stay no longer, where he could not do what he pleased; and to this end "he took his journey into a far country," *ver. 13.* that is, to a place remote from his Father's inspection: where he should have none to check or curb him in his Revelling and Riot.—We may here

Observe, 2. "That if a young Person given to any Vice or Lust, once gets into such a place where no body reproves or checks him for his sin, it is a thousand to one but he is undone." It was a part of the confession of a young man lately executed at Tyburn for Robbery, (known to many of us, for he lived some time in our neighbourhood) that he had lived in several sober families, but he left them because he could not there follow his lusts: and when once he got loose

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from these restraints, how soon did he come to ruin?

Consider this, you that are Parents, and be careful to provide pious places for your Children when you send them out into the world. Places in which it will be difficult for them to come at the Vices to which youth is prone; and where they may have religious Instruction and good Examples, and may happily escape the pollutions of a loose and profligate age.

And this is more especially to be regarded in the solemn and almost indissoluble contract of marriage; where the intimacy and affection that is due, will make it as it were natural to imitate either the good or evil manners of the dear associate, who is to be looked on as the other part of one's self. Though indeed the evil dispositions of the one, are more like to prevail over the better temper of the other, than the contrary, through the tendency of our depraved natures to that which is ill. It is a fastning of the living to the dead, which should make every one cautious and circumspect in that great affair of human life: in which to be rash and unadvised, is to run hoodwinked upon a precipice, and to make court to misery and sorrow.

These cautions are at this time the more seasonable and important, considering the dismal Debaucheries that abound both in Youth and Age.

And therefore let me exhort, yea require you that are Young, to be advised and directed by your Parents and sober Friends. Your Parents have had the experience of many years before you had any being; and they have brought you up with great pains, cost, care and trouble, expecting to reap comfort from you at last: And they cannot

want good-will to advise their own offspring to that which they think most for their advantage. Wherefore remember the counsel of divine Wisdom by the mouth of *Solomon*, Prov. i. 8. "My son, hear the instruction of thy Father, and forsake not the law of thy mother."

Had the Prodigal taken this course, he had done well. For, the first wrong step which he took was, when he departed from his Father; hereby depriving himself of the advantages of his Father's sober admonitions and example; and forfeiting the blessing of GOD, expressed in *the first commandment with promise*. Take heed, young People, that you leave not sober and serious society for the contrary: If you habituate yourselves to ill company, you run on the mouth of a cannon. The leprosy of Sin is often spread by familiar conversation. And such as converse with people that are sick of the plague, will be in danger of dying of the same distemper.

Well, the Prodigal will be gone from the government of his pious Father; and now, what will become of him? Truly it is easy to guess, what a rash Youth, left to his own will, will betake himself to. He first falls into ill company, and then to drinking and riotous living. And this adding new flames to the natural heat of youthful blood, in the next place he keeps company with harlots: And thus he "falls into a deep and narrow pit," as *Solomon* calls it, *Prov. xxiii. 27.* out of which few escape.

It was a very unhappy circumstance of this Prodigal's condition, that he had an estate given him by his Father "He divided unto them his living," *ver. 12.* This young man had not for certain been so lewd, if he had not been so plen-

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tifully provided with means to indulge in his Lusts. So that we may here make a

3d Observation, "That a plentiful Estate in the possession of a wild Youth, does most directly tend to his destruction." It is like a sword in the hand of a madman, with which he will very probably do himself a mischief. There is not a more dangerous and deplorable condition on earth than for a person that is eagerly bent towards any Vice, to have favourable circumstances to accomplish it, without any check of Conscience or rebuke of Providence. He seems to be abandoned of God to his own will, and given up to his affected Vices; and he has no kind rub or cross in his way, to stop his career in the ways of Death.

In this respect the Prodigal's wealth was his snare: but we may be sure his prodigality will soon make him poor enough. And indeed, the next news we have of him is, that he has spent all, and was surrounded with famine and distress; and that he had betaken himself to one of the most abject employments in the world, even the feeding of swine: and yet could not by this get bread to put into his mouth; no, nor so much as a bellyful of husks, on which the swine did eat. We may therefore

Observe 4thly, "That heastly Lusts will soon bring men to extreme misery in both worlds."

Solomon's observation has been fully verified by many miserable examples; namely, that "by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a morsel of bread." *Prov. vi. 26*. It brings many a plentiful estate to a poor starving fragment; and reduces many a family of note to such extreme penury, that they "are clothed with rags."

Thus it was with our prodigal Youth; his case

was miserably altered since he left his Father's house. He is now sorely hunger-bitten, and almost starved for want both of food and raiment: He has a severe fast after his former surfeits, and has now many marks of the lashes of his own folly before his eyes; and this does him more good than all his prosperity had done: for now he begins to consider what plenty he once enjoyed under his Father's roof. He remembers that his Father's dutiful Servants fared better than his wild Son: and having hope that his Father would yet shew him some favour at his return and submission to him; he takes up the resolution of the text, "I will arise, and go to my Father." As if he had said, "I will arise out of this nasty and needy condition into which my extravagancy has brought me. I am resolved to throw myself in a penitent and humble manner at my Father's feet; and I will say unto him, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee;" I am a great sinner against God and Man. I have been a very undutiful child, both to my heavenly and earthly Father, and am not worthy to be looked on as a child by either of them. I am a vile unthankful wretch, a swine rather than a man, a rebel rather than a son."

This was the purport of his humble confession; and thus humbling himself he was exalted: for his Father's eye was upon him so soon as ever he looked homeward; and the son's heart relenting, the Father's bowels are melted within him. And whereas the son comes onward drooping, the Father runs chearfully, and even prevents the words in his son's mouth, reading his repentance in his very looks: whereupon he "falls on his neck" and kisses him; giving him assurance of his

welcome, by the most affectionate and rapturous embraces. And upon this we may make a

5th Observation. "That our most gracious
" God, through the Mediation of his dear Son
" accepts even those into his mercy and favour,
" who are by outward misery brought to an ef-
" fectual return to him." The Prodigal's out-
ward want and penury awakens his conscience
through sanctifying grace, and excites such spiri-
tual sorrow as brings him to a sincere conversion
to God: and so he obtains favour in his sight.

For we must consider this Parable as a lively
representation of a sinner's apostacy from God,
and the vow of his baptism, to a vain and wicked
life. Licentious minds think themselves cramped
and confined by the commandments of God: and
that they are kept with severity from those things
which are agreeable to their sensual appetites:
And therefore they tread down those fences of re-
ligion which should keep them within the bounds
of true happiness, forsaking the only fountain of
bliss. And then, being misled by sinful lusts, and
the invisible enemy of souls, they wander about in
the course of a thousand follies and extravagancies
till they are surrounded with misery and
perplexity. Yet, if then they are awakened by
their afflictions and distress, and effectually turn to
God in time, he will have mercy on them, and
there will be joy in heaven at their conversion.

And forasmuch as we find no good thing done
by the Prodigal before he came to his holy reso-
lution expressed in the words of the text, let
us make a

6th Observation. "That we have not made
" one true step in religion, till we are come to a
" prevailing resolution for God and his king-

“dom, in opposition to all the allurements of
“sin, and this present world.” When once
man’s wicked and stubborn will is changed by
the grace of God, the man is converted, and
begins a new course of life. Then it is that we
truly set our faces towards Heaven, which we
before either forgot or despised; and then we
can no longer rest on those beds of sloth and
sensuality, on which we so drowsily snored be-
fore; but we arise, and go to our Father.

Now this should put us on the most serious and
frequent consideration of those motives which are
proposed to us in the Gospel, to incline our wills
to embrace the government and grace of our Lord
Jesus Christ; such as, ‘The infinite guilt and
danger of sin; The abundant mercies of God;
The grace and merits of our Lord Jesus Christ;
The spiritual assistances of the Holy Ghost; and
the eternal rewards and punishments of the world
to come. And in order to make these motives
effectual, we must pray to God for that new
heart which he hath promised, *Ezek. xxxvi. 26,*
27. We must beg with *David*, that God
would incline our hearts to his testimonies, and
not suffer our affections to run after covetous-
ness, or any other lust, *Psalms cxix. 36.*

And whereas this Parable is so related, that of
the two Sons which the Father had, only one
was a Prodigal, and the other very dutiful; yea,
and the Prodigal was at last reclaimed and re-
formed; let us here, in the last place, make a
mournful remark, concerning the multitude of
obstinate sinners in these times; namely,

7th Observation. “That it is a matter of great
“sorrow, and what presages ill to us, that so few
“profane persons come to the pious resolution of

“ the text,” Alas! we have many Prodigals, but few Penitents. It is a sad thought and unanswerable to right reason, to which all men are pretenders, that the greatest part of the world, yea, which is most our shame, the most of those which are called Christians, lie with contentment in the prodigal state of a dissolute and profane life. How many are there who know no other pleasure or trouble but what affects their external senses! and, like our Prodigal, they spend their time in feeding of swine, their own beastly Lusts; themselves being in truth more abominable in the sight of God than the filthy swine that wallow in the mire. They have no mind to the things of God: yea, they have a perverse dislike to his holy nature and government, and are enemies to all good.

They have a most gracious and blessed King to their Father, and might inherit a glorious and eternal kingdom, would they but arise by a real conversion, and go penitently to God, and serve him truly for the future. But they lothe the very thoughts of this, and do all they can to discredit every thing that borders on Religion; and in effect reverse the words of the text, and say, “ I will
 “ lie down again in my sinful pollutions, and will
 “ not betake myself to the ways of holiness and
 “ eternal life, though I perish in my folly.”

O poor degenerate children of men! how are ye fallen from your primitive excellency! Is this the creature that was made after the image of God? Can such as were made to enjoy an infinite all-pure fountain of goodness, be contented with a broken cistern of puddle-water? Can the reason of man, as corrupt as it is, once imagine that it is better wallowing in the mire with swine, than

conversing with Angels, yea, with GOD himself? In this wretched choice, men are more to be reproached than Devils: infernal spirits are fallen from their glorious station, and have no helper to get up again; but the kind Father of fallen men stretches forth his hand all the day long to them, to invite and assist them to come unto him, that they may have life: But vain men will not "arise" and go to their Father, but are a disobedient "and gainsaying people."

Surely, if the holy Angels above may be supposed to be as intensely concerned for the salvation of men, as the fallen Angels beneath are for their destruction, with what indignation must they needs consider the sinful follies of the children of disobedience! These blessed Angels at once perceive the happiness of serving GOD, and the poison of those Vices which wicked men idolize: And the grace of GOD tends to bring men to this true favour of things; by which, when the lovers of sin came once to be enlightened and purified, they then awake as out of a deluding dream; they condemn and renounce their follies, and "arise and go to their Father."

S E C T. II.

LET us here then consider *three* Things in the words before us:

First, The Prodigal's resolution, "I will arise
"and go to my Father."

Secondly, His humiliation—"and I will say unto
"him, Father, I have sinned against Hea-
"ven and before thee, and am no more
"worthy to be called thy Son."

Thirdly, His motives which led him to this

penitent confession, which were,

1st, The misery and wretchedness of his condition, whilst he wandered after his own vain desires and imaginations, at a distance from his Father's house, bereft of his Father's conduct, and destitute of his blessing.

2^{dly}, The necessity of changing his course of life. He saw there was nothing but scarcity, misery and death, in the ways that he had foolishly betaken himself to, and therefore he resolved to arise and go to his Father. Considering farther,

3^{dly}, The bowels and mercy of his Father. He perceives his condition to be wretched, but has hopes that it is not desperate. He confided that his Father, who was once so very kind and indulgent to him, would be so again, when he should approve himself as dutiful to him as he was before: and it succeeded accordingly.

O that our good God, the Father of us all by creation, would become our Father also by adoption! That he would, for his only-begotten Son's sake, give us such unfeigned repentance for past sin, and ingenuous resolutions of duty for the future, that we may all repeat the words of the text in a serious and affectionate manner this day; especially such of us as have hitherto been strangers to the power of God's grace, and to that inward purity of heart, which is essential to our divine religion. It is time for such who have hitherto walked loosely, without the awful fear of God, and without a just care to please and honour him in all their ways, to look about them forthwith, and to begin to "work out their Salvation with fear and trembling:" even before the great God rises out of the seat of a *Father*, to ascend the tribunal of a *Judge*!

Let us now therefore, even from this very instant, come to a peremptory point, from which we resolve by the grace of GOD never to start; namely, that we will be heartily and steadily for religion, for the pure life and hope of a Christian, in opposition to all the lusts and allurements of a carnal life. We are sure that this present life is drawing to an end, and that this is our seed-time for an eternal harvest of bliss or anguish; and that, "He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption," that is, destruction; and "he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting," *Gal. vi. 8.*

It is time therefore to stop our course in sin, and to consider whither it is carrying us. And since we cannot bear even the thoughts of dwelling with everlasting burnings, we must seriously set ourselves to do our utmost to avoid them. We must betake ourselves to our duty, not feignedly or faintly, but in good earnest, and with all the vigour that human nature, assisted by the grace of GOD, is able to act, in the ways of GOD prescribed in the gospel. Let us therefore begin with the Prodigal in the text; namely,

1st, In his efficacious resolution to repent and reform, and return to GOD; "I will arise: I will go to my Father." I will no longer lie dreaming of happiness in nasty lusts and in a deluding world, which will one day perish and come to nought. No; I will instantly arise out of my presumptuous dreams, and this carnal state, and will go right humbly to my heavenly Father; and falling down upon my bended knees before his mercy-seat, I will from the bottom of my heart bewail my corrupt nature and sinful life, and will beg his Grace and Spirit, to serve him truly all

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the days of my future life; trusting in the mercy of his Covenant and Promises through my Saviour Jesus Christ; hoping that, through his mediation and merits, his mercy will yet be vouchsafed to me a vile Profligate, who am not worthy to be called a creature of GOD, much less his *child*.

Thus, when an enlightened mind sees the baseness, the folly, and the danger of sin, it soon carries the sad news of this ill state to the Will and Affections; and the will of man having a natural abhorrence to apparent evil, it soon takes the alarm, and begins to set up resolutions of new and better courses. For so it is said of the Prodigal, that when he *came to himself*, or to have a right judgment of his sad condition, he forthwith resolved to "arise and go to his Father." The same Spirit of sanctification who gave convincing light to his understanding, did also incline his will to follow the dictates of the enlightened mind, and impowered him to act accordingly; so that he effectually resolved for GOD, and actually turned to him as soon as he really came to his right mind.

Sirs, Whoever there is among you that is carried away with his sinful lust or passion, or lives in profaneness and irreligion; I here mind you of a truth, which perhaps you will not believe now, but I am sure you will loudly confess it sooner or later, namely, that while you thus live in sin, you are not in your right mind. As the idolatrous Jews are said by the Prophet to be *mad upon their idols*, Jer. l. 38. (forasmuch as their sin clouded their reason to that degree, that they prayed to a senseless log or stone that was more helpless than themselves;) so the vicious person is mad upon his lusts, and sees not the shame, vexation and misery, which necessarily attend him in that unhap-

py course of life. As *Solomon's* youth confesses at the last, after a long insensibleness through the deceitfulness of sin: "They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick: they have beaten me, and I felt it not," *Prov.* xxiii. 35. Even as madmen wound themselves, and are insensible of the hurt they do their own flesh.

Know therefore, all ye lovers of sin, that this your inordinate affection to it is perfect hatred to your own souls. Your thirst after forbidden objects is a thirst after poison; and whenever ye indulge it, ye act as madly as he that crams his mouth with burning coals, or that poureth streams of scalding brimstone down his throat: it is a perfect phrensy to indulge your lusts. In this, men dig their own graves in this world, and their own hell in the other. By sinning against God, we resist our own happiness; we lose the prospect of future glory; we court shame; we tread the paths of death, and prepare fuel for the eternal flames.

O come then to sober thoughts, my Brother; in due time pull off that gross vail wherewith Satan blinds thine eyes. Look upwards to thy Father's house, and consider the happiness for which thou wast made, and which is yet tendred to thee. And if this awake thee not, look down into the dark cells of damned despairing souls; hear how they lament their self-destroying folly in contemning the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and selling their birthright for a few carnal morsels. O beware, my Brother, that you fall not into that place of torment through unbelief and incorrigibleness. It is cheaper learning by the sad examples of the misery of others, than our own. Wherefore take up in time, and resolve, by the grace of God, to live a new life. Without this

serious determination for a holy life, all our prayers and pretended worship of GOD are but in vain. "If we regard iniquity in our hearts, GOD will not hear us," *Psalms* lxi. 18. And therefore our public worship very properly begins with the Prodigal's resolution in the text; "I will arise and go to my Father, &c."

But it may be said, that it would seem presumptuous to speak after the manner of the text; and that any one that has a just sense of his corruption and infirmity, can hardly be brought to speak thus peremptorily of his resolutions and performances.

To this I answer; that it is a duty of absolute necessity, and of the first rank in Religion, to be determined and resolved for GOD and Religion, in opposition to all the ways of sin: but this sober resolution is always grounded on GOD's promises of assisting and enabling us to will and to do this; and therefore we must have a principal respect to the Grace and Blessing of the Holy Ghost in all our spiritual resolutions and undertakings; and the gracious promises of this divine Assistant must never abate our endeavours, but always quicken and excite them. For so the case is stated by the holy Spirit himself, *Phil.* ii. 12, 13. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." And, to stop all objections of our own disability to do this, it is added, "For it is GOD who worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." So that since GOD pleaseth to assist our wills in their determinations for holiness, we may and ought to resolve for it, and since he pleases to give grace to accomplish those resolutions in newness of life, we must strive and labour

to the utmost to effect it ; confiding in the promised succours of preventing, assisting and renewing Grace. Our good GOD, through his Son, will hear the prayers of such as seek to him in sincerity. It is a very disparaging act of unbelief, to question that which GOD hath promised several times together, *Matt. vii. 7, 8.* " Ask and it shall be given you. Seek, and ye shall find. Knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asketh, receiveth ; and he that seeketh, findeth ; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." He hath also promised, that he will pour out his holy Spirit ; that is, he will freely and plentifully give spiritual assistance to such as set themselves to do his will. " Turn you at my reproof : behold, I will pour out my Spirit upon you," *Prov. i. 23.* Yea, he will grant this as willingly and as compassionately as ever any father or mother in the world gave a piece of bread to their own child, who cried to them for hunger. For so runs that condescending promise of our LORD, *Luke xi. 11—13.* " If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone ? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent ? or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion ? If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy Spirit to them that ask him ?" Here is even an appeal to human nature itself, depraved as it is, whether the bowels of parents will not painfully yearn over a poor hungry child that cries to them for bread. And the inference is strong and undeniable ; namely, that the infinite mercies of GOD are inconceiv-

ably greater than the scanty compassion of corrupt men. Let us therefore "arise and be doing, and the LORD will be with the good," 1 *Chron.* xxii. 16. The diligent will be succoured when the slothful will be forsaken.

And here we must also take notice, that pious resolutions in the general will not do our business; but we must consider the particular ways and means whereby we offend GOD, and make particular efforts against each of them. We may not think to break the bundle of our corruptions all at once: but we must take the branches apart, and break them twig by twig, till the whole be destroyed. For though there be a deadly wound given to the whole body of sin, in the determining act of Conversion, yet this blow must be followed by hearty strokes of Mortification and Self-denial, and the lively exercises of Faith, and Prayer. Sanctification is a progressive work; and we are required to "abound in it more and more," 1 *Thess.* iv. 1. For we must never think that we have done working, till the Devil has done tempting; and till the world and the flesh have done warring against the Spirit; which will not be, till we are separated from the body.

Now the Prodigal's resolution before us consisted of two parts.

First, He resolves to leave his old wanderings and misdemeanors, and the ways that led to them.

Secondly, He resolves to return to his Father, and to observe his Commandments.

First, He resolves to leave his old wanderings and misdemeanors, and the ways that led to them. *I will arise*, says he, from these pernicious Vanities; I have slept in them too long already. The

full is advanced, my time is far spent, and I have
 not yet set forth in the ways of life; I have
 trifled and played away the morning of my age.
 I have wasted my youth and strength and wealth,
 in bad houses and loose company. O! *I will*
arise out of this hateful and wretched sort of life.
 It is a mercy that I am yet on this side the grave;
 that GOD hath shewn me my sin before I am
 damned for it. Alas! how sottishly have I lived!
 in what vain dreams have I wasted my time! but
 now, since GOD has graciously awakened me; *I*
will arise. I will not lay down my Head to sleep
 again on that bed of carnal presumption, which
 the Devil makes as soft as he can for deluded
 souls. Should I take one nap more thereon, it
 may be just with GOD that I never awake but in
 a bed of unquenchable flames; from which *Dives*,
 who scarce ever before looked heavenwards, lift-
 ed up his eyes to behold the happiness he had lost.
 Wherefore, by the help of GOD, I will certainly,
 I will speedily, I will effectually arise from this
 state of sin, and seek the face of my GOD.

Here he must be understood to leave *three*
 things; 1. His former sinful company; 2. His
 former lusts; 3. His former way of life.

1st, He resolves to leave his former sinful com-
 pany: that is, as to any partnership with them
 in their vanity and debauchery: for so the Holy
 Ghost advises; "And have no fellowship with
 "the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather re-
 "prove them," *Eph. v. 11*. A Christian must
 not be the fellow of ill society, but the physician
 of it: we must break fellowship with these, or we
 cannot walk with God. Can they that walk to-
 wards Heaven, keep company and pace with
 them that walk towards Hell? or can they that

would get to the top of an hill, join company with them that run downwards, and will tumble down all they can with them to the bottom ?

I speak not of civil conversation, nor of intercourse by way of trade and commerce, but of our chosen and delightful company. As to which the holy Psalmist says, " Depart from me, ye evil-doers, for I will keep the commandments of my GOD," *Psalm cxix. 115.* It is the same resolution with this in the text ; " I will no more comply with your humours, ye seed of evil-doers ; nor be any further a partaker of your sins. Cease your ensnaring invitations, and forbear your cursed assignations ; I am not the man I was, and will no more do as I have done : and therefore I dare not put myself into such company, wherein I must sacrifice the peace of my conscience, and the favour of my GOD ?"

We never find that the Prodigal went back to his harlots and profligate companions, after his return to his Father's house. No, he keeps wisely to the society of his Father's household, whose good examples tended to confirm his holy resolutions, and reformed conversation. Sober and religious company is like a guard of holy Angels about any person, to keep him in GOD's ways ; he must first get out of such company, before he can be very vicious. It is the remark of the inspired wise man, " He that walketh with wise men shall be wise : " but a companion of fools shall be destroyed," *Prov. xiii. 20.* The wise man here is the good and virtuous man, who will be apt to instil good instructions into the person he converses with, and to communicate something of his own warmth in spiritual things to others, through the grace of GOD ; who hath promised to make it effectual,

where it is on both sides piously undertaken.—What a divine blessing then is good and holy company! How can we duly value it! Since the good companion is often, like God's Angel to *Lot*, sent to lead us by the hand, out of a state upon which the flaming wrath of God is descending.

I therefore take this opportunity to recommend to you all, but more especially to such as are Young, that excellent method of *Religious Society*, which has of late years been happily set on foot by some of our Divines, and most happily increases by the blessing of God. Their method is so holy, so humble, so full of charity and primitive piety; and is carried on, as far as I can perceive, with such life and favour of holy things, and is so opposite to the scarlet sins of these times, that I hope it is seed sown by almighty God for a blessed Reformation, and a most happy prelude to it. Further it all you can, ye that have any zeal for God, or love of our holy Religion; “despise it not, for a blessing is in it.”

It is the avowed purpose of these societies, to “do all they do to the Glory of God;” and to think so lowly of themselves, that the reproaches of the scornful world can scarcely set them lower, than by their Rules they place themselves. And in subordination to the Glory of the great God, they bend their utmost strength to revive languishing Religion; and to maintain the honour of it by the strictest holiness of life; and to confirm this by frequent and fervent prayer, and the most solemn and affectionate celebration of the Sacrament of the LORD's Supper according to the primitive frequency, as the due love of God our Saviour requires. They are full of Alms-deeds,

and of holy discourse ; and mutually encourage each other daily to meekness, humility, and contempt of the world ; graces which have long been despised by a crooked and haughty generation ; though they are indeed the ornament of our Religion, and of great price in the sight of God. It is, they say, one of the greatest delights and diversions they have, to sing Psalms ; which they always perform with the strictest reverence of soul and body. And before they either pray to God, or praise his name, they many times read in the holy Scriptures, or some other pious book ; to excite at once the highest veneration of the infinite majesty of God, and the lowliest humiliation before him.

What I speak is from my own observation, and upon the strictest judgment I can make of their real bent and design : in which, though some of them may probably be insincere (since one of our Saviour's chosen Twelve proved a Traitor ; and some of the very angels above *kept not their first estate* ;) yet as to the temper and behaviour of many of them, I think I am so far from giving them any advantage by what is said, that I am sensible it is less than their due : For the life, the vigour and affections of real piety, have an intrinsic beauty and excellency, which it is not in the power of words to represent.

And notwithstanding the surmises of some, I think it is very manifest, that neither the church nor the state will have reason to be jealous of these Societies ; for their rules tend directly to support and advance both ; and they are professed enemies both of Schism and Sedition : though at the same time, they profess themselves lovers of all good people, though dissenting from them in opinions

which touch not the essence of Religion; looking on christian charity, candor and mildness, as common debts to all that lead a christian life.

Shall I need now to use many words to recommend these holy purposes to you? Is it not a valuable privilege to enjoy such Society? And will not the love of GOD and of your own Souls, with your desire of the propagation of Religion, and the welfare of our Nation, engage you to encourage it? especially since pious examples do recommend Religion in such a lively and attractive manner; and do so fit it for our practice, (instilling it by degrees, and that with pleasure and life;) that good company has much the advantage even of good books, in reforming a vain conversation.

And how well-pleasing this is in the sight of GOD, see *Mal.* iii. 16, 17. "Then they that feared the LORD spake often to one another: And the LORD hearkened and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the LORD, and that thought on his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." You see, GOD hearkens at the door, and will register every good word which drops from your lips: yea, not a serious thought shall escape his book of record. And such shall be honoured by a signaling Providence of GOD, in the day in which he makes up his jewels. What day is this? Why, it is the day in which he is departing from any place: then people take care of their jewels, to carry them with them; and it is probable that

this expression has respect to the *migremus hinc*, mentioned by *Josephus*, the departure of GOD from the Jewish state.

Ah! my Brethren, with trembling I speak it, methinks I see the dawning of this day of GOD's departure from us, even from us. All his methods to reclaim us have been sadly frustrated. We are judgment proof; and we have turned GOD's gracious dealings into wantonness. What can be done further for our trial by the GOD of all the earth? What method of procedure have we not already frustrated? And after all, how prodigious are our sins! and, to the eye of reason, how hopeless our reformation! In these dark circumstances I advise every particular soul to secure his peace with GOD, that he may be provided of "a sure refuge in the day of evil; for it shall be well with them that fear the LORD," *Ecc. viii. 12.*

Be so just therefore to your own interests in both worlds, as to take up this first part of the Prodigal's resolution, namely, to leave ensnaring company; partake not of their sins, lest you share in their plagues. As you dread their punishment, avoid all partnership in their pollutions.

2. He resolves to set himself against his former lusts. He seriously endeavours, through the holy Spirit, to "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts," *Gal. v. 24.* Iniquity shall not dwell with allowance in his heart. He labours to subdue the love of sin, by the prevailing love of GOD and his ways. The Prodigal must now pass under another name. He now loves his Father too well to affront him, or to depart from him. And though the love of goodness be not yet perfected in him, yet he will truly labour by daily mortifi-

fication and progress in holiness to carry it on towards perfection.

Remember, Christians, that as ever ye would walk worthy of that holy name ye bear, ye must duly exercise and carry on the spiritual work of Mortification: ye must "through the Spirit mortify the deeds of the flesh (inward and outward) "that ye may live," *Rom. viii. 13.* even that ye may live to the glory of GOD on earth, and be meet to inherit his undefiled kingdom. It must be our labour as long as we live, to hate sin more perfectly, and to love GOD more entirely. And this is Christian Sanctification: the blessed work of the Spirit of GOD on the degenerate souls of men; who here sits as a refiner, continually purging out our dross, and making us more pure vessels of honour, more and more fit for our Maker's use: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall "see GOD," *Matt. v. 8.* and indeed they only can see him with delight. As the glory of the sun's brightness is painful and intolerable to a sore eye, though nothing is more pleasant to the sound eye than to behold the shining of the sun; so to the un sanctified soul, the presence and praises of GOD are not only undesirable, but burdensome: whereas to the gracious soul, "GOD is their exceeding joy, *Psaln xlii. 4,* His courts are amiable," *Psaln lxxxiv. 1.* His commands delightful," *1 John v. 3.* and "in his presence is fulness of joy, and at his "right hand are pleasures for evermore," *Psaln xvi. 11.*

Look to this inward purification of your souls, all ye that would have your righteousness exceed the superficial righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees; lest, with them, and all other fruitless.

professors, ye be "shut out of the kingdom of "Heaven," *Matt. v. 20*. The fear of falling short at last, and being found light when weighed in the balance of the last judgment, will make every sincere Christian very careful and circumspect in all things, and ever exact in ordering his conversation aright. He will attend upon every ordinance of God with a zealous concern: He will pray without ceasing; he will watch without sleeping, as do others: He will fight against lust and passion with hearty blows; and persevere in the same with all long-suffering. He would in every action so approve himself to God, that Christ may say of him in every part of his life, "Behold a Nathanael, an Israelite indeed;" a Christian without dissimulation; a professor of Religion without guile.

Thus the Prodigal, and every sincere Convert, looks to the integrity of his heart, in opposition to impurity, vanity, and every deceitful lust.

3. He resolves to quit his former corrupt conversation; he will no more revel and riot as he had done. He will beware of wine and wantonness, and all those paths of death in which he had like to have perished. He will no more walk as others sensualists do, "in the vanity of their "minds, having their understanding darkened; "being alienated from the life of God, through "the ignorance that is in them, because of the "blindness of their heart. Who (being hurried "by exorbitant lusts) give themselves over unto "lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with "greediness." But, on the contrary, He "puts "off, as to his former conversation, the old man, "which is corrupt, according to the deceitful "lusts; and (being renewed by the holy Spirit

“ of GOD) he puts on the new man, which after
 “ GOD is created in righteousness and true holi-
 “ ness,” *Eph. iv. 18, 19, &c.* “ He casts off the
 “ works of darkness, and puts on the armour of
 “ light; and walks honestly, as in the day; not
 “ in chambering and wantonness, not in rioting
 “ and drunkenness, not in strife and envy: but
 “ he puts on the Lord Jesus Christ, and makes
 “ no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts
 “ thereof,” *Rom. xiii. 12, 13.*

In few words: A true Convert is influenced by that powerful principle of Faith, working by love to GOD and his holy will; and aims at the glory of GOD in all he does, in hopes of enjoying the glorious presence of GOD for ever. Thus he who lived like a swine before, lives like an angel now. He has his conversation in heaven; his heart is truly there; and his soul and body will in due time be there also.

He seems to take possession even now of the prepared mansions above, in that his affections are there already: his hope has cast its anchor even within that veil. And surely he cannot but have treasure there where his heart is so much.

This, this, my Brethren, is that prize of our high calling. O! let us press hard after it. Here is nothing below worthy of our precious hours, or the concern of our immortal souls. We find so much noisy discord and nasty debauchery in this present evil world, that a dove-like soul cannot tell where to set its foot, or rest itself in entire peace and quietude. And indeed, it is not fit that we should have perfect rest below, lest we should forget the promised rest above; and be ready to take our lot on this side *Jordan*, as part of the *Israelites* did, being enamoured

with the commodiousness of the place.

Let us therefore "arise and go to our Father," in whose house there are many mansions of perfect bliss. Let us make the same use of all our present wants and afflictions that the Prodigal did; namely, to hasten our journey heavenwards. We must of necessity part with all things which will separate us from God. And if we now sincerely arise from sinful pollutions, and go to our heavenly Father by faith, love and dutiful observance here below, He will ere long call us to come up into his nearer presence, to see him as he is; and to be with him where he is; yea, to triumph with him, and to be happy in him for ever.

S E C T. III.

HERE then arises an important Question; namely, How we may get to our Father? and what are the sure paths which lead to his presence? I hope you are all willing to go to God; and that you resolve to live no longer as Prodigals, "in filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness," but to live as obedient children, in strict love and duty to your God and Saviour. But perhaps some person, whose understanding is not clearly enlightened in the ways of God, may say as *Philip*, John xvi. 8. "Shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us: or as *Thomas*, ver. 5, "How can we know the way? No man hath seen God at any time." Whither then must we direct our steps, that we may go directly and surely to him? I answer;

*Secondly**, Follow the Prodigal in the second part of his resolution, as well as in the former, and that will lead you to the favourable presence

* See pages 19, 20, and 26, 27.

of God, as it did him; namely, his Humiliation: "I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

We have already considered the things which the Prodigal resolved against: let us now mind that which he positively resolved for; which was, that he would now steadily apply himself to spiritual things, and use all the appointed means to please God. He will no longer be a contemner of God's ordinances, nor a mocker of his servants; but will wait at the doors of wisdom, and account it the greatest honour in the world to be a "Fellow-citizen with the Saints, and one of the household of God." He now prays with earnest fervour, like a true Son of *Jacob*; he hears with dutiful attention, like one whose heart God has opened: and praises God with exalted affections, like a fellow psalmist of holy Angels: He diligently searcheth the holy Scriptures to find every part of his duty; and whenever he opens these blessed Oracles of God, he says in his heart, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." He watches against his own corruptions, the snares of the devil, and the entanglements of the world; and he girds on the whole armour of God, that he may be able to stand against them, and come off a conqueror.

But more particularly; the steps which the Prodigal took in his return to his Father's house, as expressed or implied in the text, were principally these:

1. He deliberately considers and weighs the terms upon which his Father would accept him, and heartily consents to them.

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2. He deeply regrets and repents of his past offences against his Father.

3. He betakes himself effectually to serve his Father in newness of life.

And if we abstract these things from the allegory of the Parable, and consider them in the practical Doctrine which our blessed Saviour teaches us, we shall find in these particulars the sum of the Gospel-covenant; and by consequence our direct way to peace with GOD.

1st, then, The Prodigal deliberately considers and weighs the terms upon which his Father would receive him into favour; and heartily consents to them. He knew full well that he must live another sort of life than he had done, if he meant to be one of his Father's beloved children; and he fully resolves so to do, relying and trusting on his Father's goodness to pardon what was past, upon his penitent return to him, and to assist him in his endeavours to serve him faithfully for the time to come.

Now these are some of the effectual acts of a vigorous and effectual Faith. For when the sinner comes, through the grace of GOD, to such an efficacious sense of the sinfulness, misery and cursedness of his condition, and to such an affecting belief of the suitableness, sufficiency and willingness of the Lord Jesus Christ to supply all his wants, and of his being ordained by GOD the Father to these blessed purposes, for the sanctification and eternal salvation of sinners; and when he considers that all that are saved by Christ must be enlightened, renewed, and governed by his gospel through the holy Spirit: and upon the serious consideration of all this, consents sincerely to the whole of it, and will adventure all upon this

bottom; This is that dedicating, covenanting, and transforming Faith, which has a title to the promises of the gospel; and by such acts as these the Soul makes its first true steps to leave a state of sin and wrath, and to obtain the mercy and favour of God. Faith is the mother-grace, the spring of those noble actions which abound in the regenerate servants of God; who by this subdue the world, crucify the flesh, vanquish the invisible powers of darkness, and do such mighty things as are recorded in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the *Hebrews*; which is a little Chronicle of the wonders done by a mighty Faith.

When this principle had powerfully influenced the Prodigal's heart, as well as convinced his judgment, with what ease, yea, with what joy did he break the chains of youthful lusts and customary sins! Faith working by love makes a *new* creature. For with one look he beholds the deluding devil leading him into the dungeon of eternal misery; and with another, he beholds the Father of mercies, kindly calling to him, and opening his arms to receive him: with one thought he considers the needy and nasty condition into which his sin had cast him; and with another, he considers the happiness of the meanest in his Father's house. And now he comes, thro' the grace of God, to the determining point, even to resolve for Heaven; for Heaven, I say, in opposition to all the ways and entertainments of sin. And hereupon,

2dly, He deeply regrets and unfeignedly repents of his past offences against his good Father. Evangelical Faith produces an ingenuous melting of the heart for sinning against infinite goodness and love, with an aversion as well as a fear

to offend again, let the bribe to it be never so great : And this is true repentance.

Methinks I see with what a dejected and ashamed countenance the Prodigal returns home : With what sorrow of heart does he consider his undutiful carriage towards his good Father : and those hateful extravagancies which he had run into since he left him ? Let us consider his confession, and we shall have an affecting account of his sorrow.

First, He acknowledges his sin : " Father, I have sinned—"

Secondly, He aggravates his sin in all its heightning circumstances ;—" against Heaven, " and before thee," or in thy sight.

Thirdly, He is sensible of the desert of his sin, " I am no more worthy to be called thy Son ; " make me as one of thy hired servants." The meanest place in thy house is better than all the advancements of ungodliness.

First, He acknowledges and laments his sin from his very heart : His words are very mournful and melting ; " Father, I have sinned." My sin, my sin troubles me sorely. It sticks me to the very heart, to think how indulgent my good Father has been to me, and what a stubborn and untractable wretch I have been towards him. I have been as a beast before him. So that he hangs down his ashamed face, and finites upon his guilty breast, saying, " God be merciful unto me a sinner !"

O! when once the sinner comes to this, when he sees his own wretchedness, desolation and danger, by reason of his sin, and groans forth his unutterable sense of its weight, there is then a happy alteration begun, and he is in the direct

way to spiritual peace and eternal rest. For the promise of divine rest is made by our Saviour to such as are *weary and heavy laden*, Matt. xi. 28. and we shall one day bless God with rapturous joy that ever he made us sorrowful after this godly sort; for this works repentance never to be repented of, yea, ever to be rejoiced in."

Secondly, He aggravates his sin, in all its heightning circumstances: Alas! "I have sinned against heaven, and before thee."

He is sorry for the impiety of his sin against God: As if he had said, "Ah! I am full of sorrow and confusion for my many and great sins against my good God; the God of my life, the God of my vows, the God of my mercies, and the God of my salvation. O that ever I should be such a wretch, to blaspheme the great God with the breath which he gave me; to abuse his wine and good creatures in revelling and drunkenness: to make the members which he gave me the members of a harlot; perverting the very end for which God my Creator made me; dishonouring his name, thwarting his will, and despising both his justice and mercy. This is the first and chief aggravation of sin, which chiefly affects the conscience. The sin is lamented, as sin; as committed against Heaven. The Hebrew word *עוון* *Heavens*, is among the Jews a usual name of God, as *Dan. iv. 26*. Where it was told *Nebuchadnezzar*, that his "kingdom should be sure unto him, after that he knew that the *Heavens* did rule." And so in the new Testament, "The Baptism of John, whence was it? of *Heaven*, or of men?" *Matt. xxi. 25*. So that the penitent principally laments his sin as

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sin; as it was committed against the authority, goodness, and perfections of God.

A true Penitent will also lament, and to his power recompence any injury that he had done to men. He will confess his fault, beseech forgiveness, and make all possible restitution to any person whom he has wronged. So the Prodigal; "Father, I have wickedly offended and grieved you; I have *sinned before thee*, my wicked life has fetched many a tear from your eyes, and many a sigh from your heart. I wasted your goods, I left your company, I disregarded your advice; for all which I solemnly arraign and condemn myself before you this day; and will no more do so wickedly."

Thirdly, He was sensible of the desert of his sin,—“and am no more worthy to be called thy Son.” Here is more implied than is spoken; for it implies the shame, loss and rejection, opposite to sonship. As if he had said; “I have deserved to be disowned and discarded by you, my good Father; as I have also deserved to have my name blotted out of the book of life; to be abandoned by the God of mercy, and to be for ever shut up in the dungeon of darkness with unbelievers and obstinate enemies of God.”

Thus will a Penitent aggravate his sin in the day of his humiliation; which is a true step to obtain mercy: for “he that humbleth himself shall be exalted,” *Luke xiv. 11*. “If thou deal-
“est sharply with thyself, says *Tertullian*, God
“will deal mildly with thee: But if thou ex-
“cusest thyself when thou art guilty, God will
“accuse thee.” And therefore another of the fathers, *Ambrose*, advises sinners to load them-
selves with self-accusations, as the ready way

to alleviate the burden of sin. Such lowly principles made those holy men of old to *walk humbly with their God*, even to a degree of humility which amazed the age they lived in, as much as it reproaches this of ours.

We may also further take notice, concerning the Prodigal's humiliation and solemn address to his Father, that he framed it in his mind before he came to utter it with his lips in his Father's presence. He first said within himself, "I will go to my Father, and say, &c." and then he went and spake accordingly. This may mind us to premeditate before we pray to the great God; as the wise man advises, *Eccles. v. 2.* "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter any thing before God." Remember the infinite distance betwixt the almighty eternal God, and a poor polluted creature. "He is in heaven, and thou art on earth; therefore let thy words be few." It is ill trifling and toying with such a tremendous thing as Prayer to the LORD of heaven and earth for things of eternal moment. A true convert will pray seriously and sensibly too; "in the Spirit, and with understanding also." And to crown all, in the last place,

3dly, He betakes himself in good earnest to serve his Father in newness of life*. We never read that the Prodigal played the runagate after his restoration to his Father's favour, but he continued soberly in his Father's family, and observed the pious orders of his house. Thus a real convert will firmly and supremely love that God whom before he dishonoured, and embrace those laws which before he despised, and venerate that piety which before he blasphemed; desiring by

* See page 38.

"patient continuance in well-doing to inherit
* the promises."

S E C T. IV.

THUS have we in our Meditations accompanied the penitent Prodigal in all the steps of his return to God. And that we may in heart and deed imitate his repentance and reformation, I come now,

Thirdly *, To recommend to you the three principal motives which led him to this penitent conversion. And truly they will appear very forcible to every serious mind; namely,

First, The deplorable condition of his present condition.

Secondly, The necessity of an alteration of it.

Thirdly, The likelihood of his succeeding in it, upon his earnest endeavours.

1. In the first place, he considered the deplorable condition of his present condition. He was as nasty as the very swine he kept, and much more hungry and empty than they. The hogs had a master that would provide for them; but he had no friend near him, none that would bestow the charity of a few husks upon the poor perishing man. He had brought himself to the most abject, sordid and comfortless condition upon earth; and to continue in these circumstances was the way to perish inevitably.

O Sirs! this is your and my case, if we are "departed from the living God through our evil heart of unbelief." The swine's wallowing in the mire, is a scripture emblem of the sinner's spiritual pollution; and the famine and nakedness which beset the Prodigal in his wild ramble,

* See page 20.

shews us the misery and wretchedness to which a carnal mind leads men." For "if they live after the flesh, they must die;" they die to all spiritual good now, and therefore will be separated from all that is good and happy for ever.

Ah! what nasty work is every worker of iniquity engaged in! to what brutal lusts and passions is he enslaved! what an ill master doth he serve! what a pitiful, degenerate, and unreasonable life doth he live! and ah! what a wretched and desperate death doth he die? And above all, what a dreadful, painful, unpitied eternity must he undergo?

O Sinner, I beseech thee, even by the mercies of God, which thou despisest, that thou wouldst do thy immortal soul that right, as to stop thy furious course in sin; and consider wisely what sweetness there is in a life of faith and holiness! what blessedness in obedience to the King of Heaven! what joy there is in peace with God! what honour in communion with the Lord of the whole world! what satisfaction, hope, and peace there is in a pious life! and what blessedness and glory there is at the end of it! And withal, consider how near we are to an eternity of bliss or torment; and how unalterable our condition will be in the other world, when once it is entered upon. He that hath the power of thinking, let him think on these things.

How long shall it be ere we come to a determinate resolution for eternal happiness! we cannot endure the thoughts of dwelling with everlasting burnings: we cannot deny but we have immortal souls, which must receive quickly an irrevocable sentence from the mouth of God, according to the manner of our life here. And we

daily see ourselves decaying, and drawing on towards the invisible state; and yet how late is it ere most of us set ourselves seriously to do the will of God; and many thousands never come at all to this point? "Ah! why will any wise person live, says one, so as no wise person dares die?" Why do we do that with delight which tends to bitter sorrow? Why do we not lay out our time and strength chiefly in the concerns of the eternal life to come? Since this world is but our passage, why do our affections stick here? How can we live in quiet, when the prospect of a future state is so cloudy? or how can we with reason and self-love do such things now, as will be our confusion and torment in the eternal state?

To what purpose have we lived all those years which God has given us, if we have not yet effectually considered to what purpose God sent us into the world; and in what our happiness consists? Is it wisdom for us to be always providing for a world in which we must stay so little a while, and make no provision for a world which has no end? Have we yet no hope in Christ? no saving interest in him? no communion with God? no fellowship with the Spirit? no sense of God's love? This is indeed a very dark and dismal state; the shades of eternal death are in it: I pray you hasten out of it. No person can make too much haste, where his life is in imminent danger. And to quicken you to this consider the Prodigal's second motive; namely,

2. The absolute necessity of his changing his condition. And this could be no otherwise done, he was sure, but by untreading the steps of his prodigal life. And therefore he goes back to his Father with speed: for he saw that if he con-

tinued at this distance from him he should perish by hunger and nakedness, and the want of all things. Though some things in this world look fair and alluring to a carnal eye, especially when varnished by the delusions of the devil; yet there is nothing in it but darkness, delusion and destruction. Like those apples of *Sodom*, which some have made mention of; which are fair, they say, to the eye, but have nothing but dust within them. The Prodigal found this true by sad experience; and methinks we should never forget his cry, *verse* 17. "I perish with hunger." My soul is starved for want of "the true meat which" "nourishes to eternal life."

My Brethren, our Father's house is the church of God: His Family, is the congregation of the faithful: His Son's body and blood, received by faith, are the true viands which nourish to everlasting life. If we are destitute of these, we are infinitely miserable: for if so, God is our enemy; his word is our condemnation; his Son will pronounce sentence against us: and it will be but a little while, and we shall be cut off from our outward christian privileges, like unprofitable branches, "and be cast into the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone for ever."

Is this a condition fit to be lived in? Can we content ourselves in the neighbourhood of such curses, and under the burden of such guilt? Pray tell me; is it not worth our while to labour earnestly for so short a time as this life lasts, to shun the eternal doom and torments of devils? Has the prince of this world so perfectly blinded your eyes, that you are not scared at the approaches of Death, and the Judgment to come; tho' you perceive that your peace is not made with God,

and that you are not partakers of that inward holiness, without which none can see his face with comfort?

Men, Women, and Children, consider I pray you in time, that if we are not regenerated by the holy Spirit of GOD, and do not become sincerely holy in all manner of conversation; if we dare indulge any carnal appetite, or neglect GOD's ordinance, or live in the contempt of any part of GOD's will; the curies of GOD's Book belong to us in both worlds; and we may, for ought any body can assure us to the contrary, make our bed in hell before the light of the next day shines upon us.

Since there is therefore such absolute necessity of becoming sincere converts to GOD in time, let none of us settle again on the lees of a carnal state; but let us in time "arise and go to our Father; for he is gracious and merciful, and ready to forgive." This leads us to consider the third motive which inclined the Prodigal to return to his Father; namely,

3. The likelihood of his succeeding in it, upon his sincere endeavours. He confided in the goodness of his Father, and trusted that he would not reject, but cherish those first kindlings of love towards him. He considered with what tenderness his Father had brought him up; and with what unwillingness he parted with him; and with what bounty he gave him a portion of his goods; and what patience he had exercised towards him in his prodigal life; and he concludes with reason, that his bowels were not perfectly hardened against him yet; or however, that though he might justly loath him when a Prodigal, yet he would

would love him when a Penitent. And it proved according to his expectation ; yea much better than he could have hoped : for so soon as ever his Father could get sight of him, and beheld that his Son's face was towards him, even whilst he was at a distance, his Father ran to meet him. The good old man seems to forget his years, he ran like a nimble youth ; such spirits had his joy infused : and though he found his son all in rags, besmeared with dung, and stinking with the stench of swine, yet the Father's love digests all these loathsome circumstances ; and before the son could confess his fault, the Father falls on his neck, and vouchsafes to embrace that lump of filth and beggary. His Father reads his son's repentance in his looks : and this blessed grace blots out a multitude of sins. The Father does not so much as upbraid him with what he had been, for joy of what he now is. For he looked upon him as *raised from the very dead*. His sins had been so enormous, and he had so long abandoned himself to them, that his Father had despaired of his conversion, and gave him over for lost : but he now beholds his son become another man : and now the best clothes and the best cheer in the house are called for to entertain him ; and all the neighbourhood rings with the music and mirth of the house ; and the burden of their joyful songs was this ; " My son was dead, and is alive again : " he was lost, and is found."

My Brethren, this is the true description of God's mercy to returning sinners, drawn to the life in this Parable by the Son of his bosom, who could best set forth his love to us. Let this then incline us all to return to God with speed and

sincerity: And whatever our sins have been, let them not overwhelm us in despair; though they must humble us to repentance.

Let me here leave this Rule with you, which I pray you to remember and practise, when both my lips and pen shall no more be able to give you instruction: namely, "That you do not suffer your sins, how horrid soever, to drive you *from GOD, but to him.*" For when the devil has brought you into the snare of sin; his next plea is, that you can never get out of it: that you cannot have the face to go to GOD; or to seek his mercy in this odious condition, into which sin has brought you. And if he can prevail with the sinner to sit still in his sin, and never look out for a remedy, he has his end. But beware, I beseech you, of this wile of the devil; and say with the Prodigal, "I will arise, and ask pardon of my Father. He has laid help upon One that is mighty to save," *Isa. lxiii. 1.* and "through him he will abundantly pardon," chap. *lv. 7.* The Lord "Jesus Christ is able to save to the uttermost them that come to GOD by him," *Heb. vii. 25.* and "will in no wise cast out such as come unto him," *John vi. 37.*

Eusebius has recorded a memorable passage of *St. John the Evangelist*, concerning a young man of a great capacity and a promising countenance, in order to whose education this holy Apostle had given a particular charge to the Bishop of the place where the young man lived. But notwithstanding all the care that was taken, he proved a very dissolute and wild man; and, after the practice of many sorts of wickedness, despairing of the mercy of GOD, he became the Captain of a band of Robbers, wholly bent on rapine, murder, and

cruelty. Of which when St. *John* was informed, he rode to the place where he used to rob, and being taken by some of them, desired to be carried to their Captain. But no sooner did this great Robber behold the awful face of St. *John*, but he was stricken with shame, and fled away, Upon which the good Apostle ran after him, crying, "My Son! my Son! why fleest thou from thy Father unarmed and old? O my Son, have compassion on me; be not afraid; there is yet hope of salvation for thee. I will undertake for thee with Christ. I will die for thee, if need be, as Christ died for us. I will hazard my soul for thine. Trust to me. Christ sent me." The Robber hearing this, first stood still, casting his eyes on the earth; and then fell into a trembling, and at last wept so bitterly that he seemed to baptize himself in his own tears. And here the humiliation of the Thief, and the embraces of the Apostle, seemed to be another Prodigal returning to his Father, and received with joy: for he was hereby brought to repentance and newness of life. EUSEB. *lib. iii. cap. 23.*

Let us then be assured, from the abundant promises of GOD, and the examples of his mercy to sinners, (of which his forbearance towards every one of us is a near instance to convince us) that GOD will shew mercy to the worst of sinners that have hearts to repent and forsake their sins.— "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool," *Isa. i. 11.* The change of your heart and life, by the grace of GOD, will make a blessed alteration in your present state, and future expectations.

Truly, Sirs! there is no day so beneficial, so happy, so blessed to us, as that of our unfeigned conversion to GOD. For then the face of our heavenly Father is turned towards us, his arms are incircled about us, and his bosom opened to us. Then we may look up towards Heaven with comfort, and think of eternity with delight; we may meet death with an unshaken peace; and lay by our bodies, as we put off our old clothes, in hope of receiving them in a better frame at the resurrection.

S E C T. V.

THUS have we considered the Prodigal's *resolution* of returning to his Father; with his *humiliation* before him; and the *motives* which excited him to both:

Let us now more particularly apply all this to ourselves.

And here we are concerned to bring ourselves to an impartial self-examination, as in the presence of GOD; whether we are in the Prodigal-state of distance and disaffection to GOD, or in a penitent and converted one? How stands the case with us? Are we of the invisible church of GOD, or of the synagogue of Satan? "All we like sheep have gone astray, every one in his own way," says the Prophet, *Isa.* liii. 6. But are we risen from the follies and wanderings of our vain conversation, or are we not?

This is a point which deserves our most speedy, most serious consideration: What! "know ye not your own selves," says the Apostle; "how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be rebates?" *2 Cor.* xiii. 5. If this work of sincere conversion of the heart be not yet effected; what

mockery is all our profession of Religion! and how unfavourable are all our prayers and other vain performances in the nostrils of God! The whole purport of the first chapter of *Isaiah*, is to chide and rebuke the trifling and insincere meddlers with religion. To what purpose do they take God's Book into their hand, or his covenant into their mouth, who hate to be reformed?

Since it is therefore a matter of such consequence, let us, without any manner of misrepresentation, bring ourselves directly and impartially to this one question; namely,

Have we affectionately and unfeignedly made, and do we to our utmost power, through grace, faithfully keep the vows of the Christian Covenant? Have we such an abiding sense of the infinite evil of sin, and the immense excellency of God and his ways, that we have solemnly and resolutely devoted ourselves to God, through his Son Jesus Christ, according to the terms of the Covenant of Grace? and is the bent of our heart, and the course of our life indeed agreeable to this holy purpose? Do you serve God, or Mammon? Do you live after the flesh, or after the Spirit? By faith, or by sense? Do you resemble the Prince of Light, or the Prince of Darkness? and to which of these are you subject? Who has your heart, and whom do you serve? What interest do you side with in the choice and course of your life? either that of God in Jesus Christ, or the interest of this world, and the will of the flesh and the devil? Does your desire and resolution to please God overbear all contrary desires and inclinations? and is the favour of God the chief happiness you propose to yourself? and in order to this,

is the holy gospel your chosen rule of life?

Since many questions are apt to puzzle weak minds and scrupulous consciences, I have here chosen to refer you to one very plain one, which is the foundation of the Christian Religion, and of the Christian Hope. I pray you, prove yourselves by it without deceit: the delusion will be your own, if you deal otherwise.

And if you find your case good, and your heart and ways truly Christian, be sure to offer GOD, through the blessed Mediator, the praises due to his name on this account. O happy you! if you can appeal to GOD in the words of the elder Son, *verse 29*. "Lo! these many years have I served thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment," not by a known and wilful transgression, or by no such sin not truly repented of. If so the Father's answer to those words may be applied to you, *verse 31*. "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." We have a promise as full as this, *Rev. xxi. 7*. "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his GOD, and he shall be my Son." This is blessed beyond expression; an inheritance which exceeds all estimation.

But if on the contrary your self-examination shews you your wanderings from GOD, and your distance from his gracious presence, I then beseech you, with all the earnestness I am able to speak; yea, I charge you in the name of GOD, that you hasten your return to him: for why, O! why will you die in your sin, and perish for ever?

Do you indeed consider your mortality and immortality? Have you ever thoroughly considered how dreadful it is, to die in a prodigal state; at a wide distance from your Father's house; and un-

der his heavy displeasure? without hope of Heaven, or any further mercy from the sole fountain of it? with terrors without, and agonies within? with an almighty enemy above, and immortal enemies beneath? crushed by a multitude of intolerable sufferings, without any manner of support, or hope of mitigation?

Surely the merry contented sinner never yet thought so far as this; he is so dazzled by the present gaiety of sin and so hoodwinked by the Prince of darkness, that he discerns not the dark clouds, which gather about him, and the horrible tempest which is falling upon him. But there is one text of Scripture, which one would think should awaken and undeceive every sinner, that is not perfectly dead to all that is spiritual: It is that tremendous question put to sinful men by the Holy Ghost, *Rom. ix. 22.* "What if God, "willing to shew his wrath, and make his power "known, endured with much long-suffering the "vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?" O dreadful! the righteous God will give an example of his almighty power in the punishment of the damned! It shall be seen by Angels and Men, how miserable the omnipotent God is able to make condemned men. "Who knows the power "of his anger!" says the Psalmist, *Psalms xc. 11.* O horrible! it exceeds comprehension; yet must he endure by guilty persons to all eternity. "As "the man is, such is his strength," *Judges viii. 21.* A Giant can give a more smarting and a more deadly blow than a Child. O then, who can bear the weight of almighty power, put forth to the utmost in direful vengeance, and that for ever! O dismal sufferings! which no revolutions of

ages, or millions of years, can so much as lessen! for still those miserable souls are no nearer to an end of their sufferings than at the beginning of them.

Tell me, all ye that live unrighteously, intemperately and ungodly! are ye willing to die thus? "Can ye dwell with everlasting burnings? Can your hand be strong, or can your heart endure in that day in which the GOD of judgment shall deal with you after your deservings?" I know ye cannot. O then, take better courses in time, that ye may come to a more blessed end.

And yet, lest I should not have sufficiently roused the lethargic sinner; and because I know that such as see their natural face in a glass, and are terrified with it for the time, are apt to go away, and forget what manner of men they are, and how near and terrible their dangers are; and because the invisible enemies of goodness will be busy in their endeavours to steal away the seed sown; I make this request to every captive of Sin and Satan; that they would retire, and give the following questions a serious consideration? by which I desire you to expostulate and reason the case with your own souls.

Question 1. Lovest thou the GOD of thy mercies and blifs so little, as to part with his favour for such trifles as sin affords? For a little drink which thou needest not, and which can only please thee whilst it is running down thy throat? Or for a few moments of filthiness, like *Esau*, who for one carnal morsel sold his birthright? Or for a few sums of money, which thou must leave quickly, or they thee; and which bring disquiet to thy mind, and cannot profit thee in the day of wrath? Or for a few ill words, which

bring neither profit nor pleasure here, yet pull down infinite torments in the eternal state?—What a reproach is it to a reasonable creature to act so madly and disingenuously!

Quest. 2. Is the authority of the great God so contemptible, that his command cannot stop thee? Dost thou despise the Governor of the world, who is able to destroy both your soul and body eternally?

Quest. 3. Can any thing be a secret to God? or will the hidden sins of men be long secret to the world? Does not God fill all places with his presence? Does not his knowledge enter where the light cannot? And has he not appointed a day when every secret sin shall be laid open?

Quest. 4. Has not any soul greater peace in the mortification of inordinate lusts and passions, than in their rage and fury? Is there not greater sweetness, honour and hope, in the liberty of those whom the Spirit of God frees from the tyranny of sin; than in the slavery, toils and vexations of such as are the slaves of beastly appetites and passions?

Quest. 5. Does not christian self-denial produce great inward comfort? And does not the conquest of a temptation bring us the joy and glory of a noble triumph? And does not spiritual joy vastly exceed carnal mirth?

Quest. 6. Has not sinful indulgence sad twitches of conscience, a painful regret of mind, and dismal forebodings of an after-reckoning; threatening them, as they say the Ghost did *Brutus*, to meet them hereafter to their terror?

Quest. 7. Is it a light matter to contradict the end for which we were made, and to pervert our

faculties, and abuse the mercies of God? Will a just God bear this long?

Quest. 8. Is it not self-enmity to despise the Lord Jesus Christ, the gracious Saviour of men? and to trample on his blood, grieve his Spirit, and neglect that great Salvation which he has purchased at so dear a rate?

Quest. 9. What if thou shouldst be forsaken of God, and given up to the blindness, hardness, and perverseness of thine own corruption;—Would not thy case then be as wretched even as that of devils themselves?

Quest. 10. How many mercies of God are past! How many present! And what offers are made of an eternity of mercy to come! And shall all these lose their end? Will not these rivers of oil melt and soften thy hard heart?

Quest. 11. How if thou shouldst be taken out of this world this day by some violent distemper, or some unforeseen accident? How couldst thou appear before God, or render an account of all the passages of thy life, or bear the doom of the last sentence?

Quest. 12. Didst thou ever look back on any sin committed, and not wish it undone? Does not sorrow succeed the shameful acts of wickedness, as soon as ever the violence and rashness of it is over? And why then wilt thou again make work for sorrow and repentance?

Quest. 13. Is it not the greatest honour that man can have, to converse with God? the greatest satisfaction to have peace with him? and the greatest happiness to be his favourite?

Quest. 14. Is not our departure from God the cause of our sorrows, and the very essence of our misery? Would not hell itself lose its name,

if the gracious presence of GOD were there?

Quest. 15. Have we any interest or concern upon earth so great and important as to repent of our sins, and return to our GOD, and to glorify his name upon earth, and do the work he has given us to do?

Consider these things duly, and shew yourselves men. Act as reason and self-preservation, influenced by Faith, will direct you in this case. Grudge not, I pray you, to spend a little time to secure a glorious eternity.

S E C T. VI.

AND let me here subjoin our Saviour's words, though spoken on another account, "What thou dost, do quickly." The shortness and uncertainty of our mortal life, will not bear the lingerings and loiterings of a tedious suspense. Many a soul has been snatched away into its eternal condition, whilst it has been entertaining itself with uncertain thoughts of preparing for it.

Indeed nothing frustrates the design of Religion more, than the putting off the holy purposes of it from day to day: Because this administers something of ease to a deluded soul; and at the same time prepares a net for its destruction. And alas! how many thousands have perished in this fatal snare! It is very probable, that of the many millions now in hell, there are but few but had in their life-time some thoughts of repenting hereafter. But when GOD says, "*Now* is the accepted time, *now* is the day of salvation," 2 Cor. vi. 2. it is a very absurd and hateful presumption, for a poor dependent mortal to say, "*Not now, but hereafter.*" By men's delays they harden their hearts; they make the bonds of customary sins

stronger ; they provoke GOD to give them up to their lusts and delusions : And though they will every day need more grace than other, in order to their repentance, yet they are less and less likely to obtain it. So that in effect, by persuading people to delay their repentance, the devil secures his game better than he could by tempting them at once to resolve against salvation ; because this is so horrible a thing, that no conscience can be supposed to bear it long ; whereas the other way of procrastination, very often prevails on men to the day of their death.

Besides ; consider, my Brother ! if it could be as you vainly project, that you could spend the most of your time in sin, and yet be saved at last ; would you not be ashamed to appear before the infinite Majesty of your Creator, when you reflect on what you have done ; and see how much you have done for the devil, and how little for GOD ?

What ! shall only your old age be at GOD's service ? Will you offer dry bones upon his altar ? An honest heathen would blush at this. " Does it not shame thee, says *Seneca*, to squander away the active and useful part of thy time in vice, and only to reserve those last hours of thy life for sobriety and virtue, which thou knowest not how to employ otherwise ?" And again, " Ah ! how late is it to begin to live, when our life is ending ?" *SEN. de Brev. Vitæ.* And we have it from a better pen, that " the blind and feeble cattle, (the emblems of old age) offered in sacrifice to GOD, would not be accepted," *Mal. i. 8.* that is, when they had a male in their " flock," as all such as are young now have ; that is to say, a more strong and more perfect service

in their power, than what will be in their capacity when they are old.

So then, forasmuch as the Young man in this Parable has been the subject of my discourse all along, I now turn my concluding Exhortations to Young Persons in a particular manner.

Ye that are now in the flower of your age, and the morning of your time; consider, I pray you, the misery which attended the misled Youth in the text; and be careful that you do not mis-spend the golden days of your life. O! what a vile shame is it, for any young Men and Women to sacrifice their first fruits to the devil! to pollute some of their first breath by profane language! and to dedicate the prime of their strength and time to lust, and wine, and profaneness! I beseech you, do not thus foolishly and perversely. This will only be the sowing of thistles and brambles in the spring, which will not comfort, but torment you, and tear your breasts in your declining years. For if you should be so unwary and unhappy, as to begin your years in polluting follies, it will come to this; namely, that you must either walk back, and undo what you have done amiss, with shame and sorrow, if God gives you such grace; or go on heedlessly to eternal horror and destruction.

Let me therefore advise you to set out aright, that you may finish your course with joy. Do not so much as desire to taste the poisonous baits of youthful lusts. It is madness to eat that which will be your death if you do not vomit it up again.

If therefore the sottish wine-bibber, or the nasty creature who is above all others called *an*.

clean; or the person who by cozenage and robbery gets unjust gains, say unto thee, "Come with us, partake of our mirth and jollity:" as thou fearest God, consent thou not: be not a partaker of their dainties, lest thou pay dear for them in the end. "If you laugh with them now, you will howl with them hereafter."

And beware, Young People, that you think not within yourselves, that you have so much time before you; that you may sin now, and repent hereafter; lest Death come suddenly, and finding you in sin, you be doomed eternally to that place of torment, where all repentance will be in vain. It is infinitely best not to taste of sin at all; for one sin does but open a gap for a greater, till the conscience be laid waste; and then it is ten thousand to one but the soul is lost for ever. Let me therefore intreat you to accustom yourselves to sober thoughts and divine meditations in your youth. Begin this noble exercise betimes: by which, methinks, a good and wise man seems to excel the sottish and unthinking part of mankind, more than these exceed the more sagacious part of brutes.

And that I may give you a proper subject for your early meditations, I think you will scarce find a consideration which more tends to your advantage, then to think deeply and frequently of the benefits of an early conversion: some of which I will briefly hint to you.

1. Youth is the proper time appointed by God for it. This seems to be taught in type under the Mosaic Law; by which they were required to offer up Lambs, Kids, Calves, young Pigeons, and the First-fruits of all; and is expressly requir-

ed, *Eccles.* xii. 1. "Remember now thy Creator
" in the days of thy *Youth*."

It is indeed the proper time for it; because we are made wholly for GOD, and ought to enter upon our work in GOD's vineyard so soon as ever we are able to do any thing there. If otherwise, how can we present ourselves amongst the labourers in the evening to receive our wages? or how can it indeed be in the nature of things; can he expect a plentiful harvest, who neglects the proper seed-time? or, can he come timely to the end of a long journey, who loiters long in the morning? *Solomon* lamenteth, "that man knoweth
" not his time," *Eccles.* ix. 12. And if you trifle away the golden season of youth, you will have reason to take up the same lamentation at the last.

2. Consider, if in your Youth you set yourself to the work of Religion, it will the more surely be accomplished. Now time is before you; your heart is comparatively tender; your actual sins are fewer; your faculties more free; your mind less prejudiced; your GOD more near to you; and his promise of your finding favour with him, very positive, *Prov.* viii. 17. "Such as seek me
" early shall find me."

3. The more early your conversion is, the greater will your growth in grace be. To what a blessed eminency in grace will those advance, who have been improving their talents ever since they were capable of acting with reason! They will be able to run with the horse-men, and be some of the foremost in the Christian race.

4. Hereby your inward peace will be the more firmly established. You will shun those doubts about the love of GOD, and the safety of your

case, through which many go drooping, and with sad hearts.

5. You will be the greater ornament of Religion: it will be seen in you, that the grace of God is able to subdue the violence of youthful lusts, to do which Philosophy has confessed its weakness; and therefore *Aristotle* affirms, that Young Men are not proper hearers of the rules of Philosophy. But the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ made young *John* a steady disciple, and young *Timothy* a grave bishop. It is recorded to the honour of *Mnasien* to this day, that he was an old disciple, *Acts* xxi. 16. And *St. Paul*, speaking of *Andronicus* and *Junia* his kinsmen, gives them an honourable preference, even the right hand of fellowship, as those that "were in Christ before him," *Rom.* xvi. 7. God will surely honour those, who thus honour him by an early preferring of his service before all the glittering temptations proposed to their senses by the World, Flesh and Devil.

6. You will hereby become a greater help to others; a more eminent example to them; a more sufficient counsellor and comforter of them; and a more powerful intercessor for them.

7. You will have greater hope and comfort in your death: which indeed you will find worth all the pains you have undergone. All the weary steps which you have taken in your Christian race will be forgotten, when once you come to finish it with joy.

There may be some extraordinary instances which may seem to contradict this: but in the ordinary procedure of things, a strong faith will have strong consolation.

8. This is the way to greater glory in heaven. You will shine like stars of the first magnitude. The young disciple, St. *John*, was "the disciple whom Jesus loved, and who lay in his bosom," *John* xxi. 20.

O admirable! To what peace and glory, and honour, and bliss, do the commands of GOD lead us! It may be well said, "Blessed are they who do his commandments." *Rev.* xxii. 14. They have even now some foretastes of the fruit of the tree of life. They are now beloved of GOD; members of the Lord Jesus Christ; comforted by the holy Spirit; guarded by holy Angels; a part of GOD's family; yea, his dear children; and the heirs of his kingdom. Such is the happiness (shall I say?) or rather the glory, of the faithful servants of GOD. Aspire unto this advancement, all ye that have any sense of honour! Who can too soon make sure of that which cannot be duly valued when enjoyed; nor ever recovered when lost!

O that every obstinate sinner, who is the *real Prodigal* in the text, would effectually consider this: Count up the cost of your sins, O ye unthinking souls! If there be any possibility in Arithmetic to sum up the least part of it. Consider what you lose by your distance from GOD, and your being destitute of the *hope* that is set before you. Will your few moments of sensual pleasure, and your few pence of unlawful gains, (which is all you can pretend to get by sin) make amends for the infinite loss of heaven, and the eternal sufferings of hell? If not; why tarriest thou in such a state of loss and danger? Why do you not instantly arise, and humble yourself before GOD, and inquire with all the concern you

are able, "what you must do to be saved."

O my Brother! every hour that you defer effectual amendment, you run such a risk as is enough to amaze you, whenever you seriously state your own case; for there is but the rotten plank of this frail life betwixt you and everlasting torment.

Wherefore be advised, Young Men and Women, to go forth early to your labours in God's vineyard; and then your work will advance with your time; and your improvements will be so conspicuous, that you will be like pillars in the church of God. Your steady course in the ways of God, will glorify your Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier; and will adorn your profession, and honour your name, and comfort your heart, and eternise your happiness.

And whilst vicious and profligate Youths afflict their friends, defile their consciences, becloud their understandings, wound their souls, bring temporal judgment upon their country, and eternal plagues upon themselves; you will rest quiet from the fear of evil in both worlds; being sensibly interested in the favour of God, and in his promises relating to the life that now is, and that which is to come.

How can any of us then refuse to live with such honour as our holy Religion directs, in order to die in such peace and bliss as it doth promise!

To conclude therefore: Let us all seriously set ourselves to turn unto the Lord by a penitent and renewing Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us "arise, and go to our Father," whilst he yet looks whether we will return to our duty or not; and is desirous of an opportunity to shew us mercy. And if we thus turn to him, and walk in his ways, we shall certainly find the kind embraces

of our heavenly Father now, and be commended of him before Men and Angels in the last great day; and from henceforth partake of the bliss and glory of his kingdom for ever.

Which I pray GOD vouchsafe to us all, for the sake of his ever-blessed Son, our only Mediator and Redeemer. *Amen.*

The Prayer of a Returning Prodigal Paraphrased,

Which may be used by a Penitent Sinner.

Father, I have sinned against Heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son.

The Paraphrase.

O MOST bountiful and long suffering GOD, from whose infinite goodness I have received my Being, and all the enjoyments of my whole life; I am grieved at my heart that I have wickedly departed from thy gracious presence and holy government; following my deceitful lusts, and partaking with many wicked persons in sundry pollutions and pernicious courses: to the great dishonour of Thee, my glorious Creator, and to the great offence of many good people. O Lord, I sincerely bewail my foolish and abominable misdoings: I reflect with shame upon my forgetfulness of thee, and my disregard of my duty to thee. O Lord, I am not worthy to be called thy Servant, much less thy Son: I have destroyed myself; but in thee is my help. O! receive me into thy blessed family: make me obedient to thy holy government; and grant me thy favour,

68 THE PRAYER OF A PENITENT.

which is the only thing that can make me happy. I have never enjoyed a good hour since I departed from thee. The tyranny of devils and inordinate lusts, have worried me into continual toils and vexations; have brought me to a most wretched and destitute condition; and have exposed me to everlasting misery. But I now return unto thee, though most unworthy of thy mercy, trusting in the merit of thy beloved Son, who never offended thee, and who has made an offering for sin. For his sake, O Lord, pity my condition, and wash me in the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness: Pity my darkness, and anoint my eyes with eye-salve: Pity my nakedness, and clothe me with his white raiment: Pity my Poverty and enrich me with gold purified in the fire. I have been a vile Profligate; but be pleased, O Lord, to make me a true Penitent, and from henceforth a new creature. And that I may no more depart from thee, be pleased, O Lord, to put thy fear into my heart, and to mortify the deeds of the body by thy Spirit, that I may live; even live to thy honour whilst I live on earth, and may live with thee for ever, when I shall go hence and be no more seen. All which I humbly beg through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

OUR Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread: And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

A PRAYER against Youthful Lusts.

O MOST glorious and ever-blessed GOD, the fountain of all holiness and perfection, who hast given thy only Son to men, to redeem them from all iniquity; I beseech thee, O Lord, for his sake, to purify me as one of thy peculiar people, zealous of good works. Enable me, I beseech thee, to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts; that neither the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, nor the pride of life, may ever pollute my conscience, debase my soul, destroy my peace, or overthrow my hope. But make thy love, O my GOD, to prevail over all other affections, and thy fear to control all other passions; that I may fight the good fight of faith, and may lay hold on eternal life; through Jesus Christ, my most desired Lord and Saviour. *Amen*

A PRAYER for a Young Person.

MOST glorious and ever-blessed GOD! The life of our life, and the GOD of our salvation! I look up unto thee, the fountain of all goodness, through the Lord Jesus Christ, whom thou hast ordained to be our Mediator, with humble thankfulness for all the mercies of this present life, and for the hope of everlasting happiness.

It is of thy great goodness that I was born in a Christian land; and of thine infinite mercy that I was early brought into thy covenant of life and peace, through the blood of the New Testament.

O my GOD, I desire to embrace the engagements, as well as to enjoy the blessings of this

thy gracious covenant; earnestly imploring thy grace, that I may live suitably to my holy profession: that so I may never dishonour thy holy name, nor in thought, word or deed, deny the Lord that bought me.

Send thy holy Spirit, I beseech thee, into my soul, to lead me to repentance and newness of life. Baptize me, O Lord, with that divine fire which may at once consume my sinful lusts, and enflame my soul with divine love.

Lord make me to know thee, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent; prepare my soul to receive him sincerely in all his saving offices; and make him effectually to me a Prince and a Saviour, to give me repentance and forgiveness of sins.— Through him, O Lord, forgive my natural corruption, and heal my leprous soul. And for his sake forgive all my actual sins; all the transgressions of my youth; my sins after vows, contrary to knowledge, and against thine infinite goodness. O Lord! for the sake of my crucified Saviour, be merciful to my unrighteousness, and remember my iniquity no more.

And that I may no more commit the same or other offences, vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep me by thy grace from every sinful way, and lead me in the way everlasting. Preserve me from the pollutions of youthful lusts; and protect me against the solicitations and evil examples of impudent and daring sinners. Be pleased to shew me the vileness of sensual pleasures, the emptiness of worldly possessions, and the folly of getting any thing on earth by the loss of thy favour. Bless me, O Lord, with an early conversion, with an unblameable life, with a hopeful death, and a blessed eternity.

Give me, good God, thy peace, which passeth all understanding; and so preserve me from the corruptions of this world, that I may inherit the glory of thy undefiled kingdom.

And whereas there are legions of infernal powers, who seek to hinder my entrance into that rest; O Lord, leave me not to their malice, nor my own frailty; but ever succour me with thine especial grace and peculiar Providence; and make me as ready to help, and to forgive others, as to desire help and forgiveness of thee, my God.

Make me to lead my life in thy fear, and in the sense of thy favour, and to grow in grace as I advance in years; ever mindful of my Creator, my Mortality, and my future Account. That living here to thy glory, I may for ever praise thee in thy glorious kingdom, through Jesus Christ, who is my hope; to whom, with thee, O Father, and the eternal Spirit, one God, be all honour and glory ascribed by angels and men for evermore. *Amen.*

THE REPENTING PRODIGAL.

BEhold the wretch, whose lust and wine
Had wasted his estate;
He begs a share among the swine,
And craves the husks they ate!—

- “ I die with hunger here, he cries;
“ I starve in foreign Lands:
“ My Father's house has large supplies,
“ And bounteous is his hands.
“ I'll go, and with a mournful Tongue,
“ Fall down before his face;
“ Father, I've done thy justice wrong,
“ Nor can deserve thy grace.”—

He said—and hasted to his home,
To seek his Father's love,
The Father saw the Rebel come,
And all his bowels move.

He ran and fell upon his neck,
Embrac'd and kiss'd his son:
The rebel's heart with sorrow brake
For Faults that he had done.

- “ Take off his clothes of shame and sin,”
(The Father gives command)
“ Dress him in garments white and clean;
“ With rings adorn his hand.
“ A day of feasting I ordain:
“ Let mirth and joy abound:
“ My son was dead, and lives again;
“ Was lost, and now is found.”

F I N I S.